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Response by official statistics to the Sustainable Development Goals

The role of national statistical offices pertaining to measuring sustainable development

Note by the Office for National Statistics of the United Kingdom

Summary

The paper sets out how the Office for National Statistics of the United Kingdom has prepared for national reporting and raised awareness about the impact of collecting data for Sustainable Development Goals across the Government Statistical Service. Some of these actions include: coordinating responses to consultations, hosting workshops, developing a dedicated web page to share information and developments with key partners, assessing potential frameworks for both reporting and measuring of goals and targets against other national and international frameworks, reviewing the measurability of proposed targets and evaluating availability of data for indicators and whether indicators can be disaggregated. This paper also describes the work with policy colleagues to ensure that statistical measurability will be considered throughout each stage of developing Sustainable Development Goals and to support the international work on data revolution.

The paper is presented for discussion to the first session of the Conference of European Statisticians' seminar "Response by official statistics to the Sustainable Development Goals".

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I. Background to the measurement of sustainable development

1. The United Kingdom (UK) Government launched its Vision for Mainstreaming Sustainable Development in 2011. Following a public consultation and a commitment made in that Vision, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) developed a revised set of Indicators in 2013. The Sustainable Development Indicators (SDIs), which were the outcome of this consultation, provide an overview of progress towards the three pillars of sustainability: the economy, society and the environment. The first of the 'Sustainable Development Indicators' series was published in July 2013. In April 2014 responsibility for maintaining and reporting the SDIs transferred to ONS (details on SDIs are in Annex I).

2. Since 2012, ONS has produced and published a set of measures of national well-being. The publication of the headline set of indicators reflect a framework that is based on 10 domains including health, education and skills, governance, the natural environment, etc. (details of the domains and measures are presented in Annex II). In addition to the 10 domains, the framework includes the dimensions of sustainability and equality to provide a more complete measure of how the country is doing.

3. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development - or Rio+20 - took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on 20-22 June 2012. It resulted in a focused political outcome document "The Future We Want" which contains clear and practical measures for implementing sustainable development. In Rio, Member States decided to launch a process to develop a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which will build upon the Millennium Development Goals and converge with the Post-2015 Development Agenda. It is expected that national statistics offices will be asked to report against the Sustainable Development Goals from 2016 onwards and that such reports will be annual.

4. In the UK, data collection, statistical and analytical work for government is not carried out by one organisation. Overall control of the UK's official statistics is under the remit of the UK Statistics Authority (UKSA) which is an independent body operating at arm's length from Government as a non-ministerial department directly accountable to Parliament. It has two main functions: oversight of ONS and independent monitoring and assessment of official statistics, maintaining a Code of Practice for Official Statistics and accrediting Code-compliant statistics as 'National Statistics'. The Government Statistical Service (GSS) is the community of all civil servants who work in the collection, production and communication of UK official statistics. It includes not only statisticians, but also economists, social researchers, information technology professionals, and secretarial and clerical staff. Members of the GSS work in ONS, most UK Government departments, and the devolved administrations. The National Statistician, John Pullinger, is the Head of the GSS. In 2013, ONS was asked to coordinate input of the GSS into the Post-2015 Development Agenda for Sustainable Development.

II. Working alongside policy colleagues

5. A key role for the statistical community was to encourage those working on political negotiations to seek technical input and advice.

6. In early 2013, ONS recognised the immediate need for GSS to input into the political discussions and negotiations on the Post-2015 Development Agenda for Sustainable Development. With the UK National Statistician's support, ONS became a GSS representative at key groups where UK political priorities and strategies on SDGs were being discussed. The purpose of attending these meetings is to:

- Understand government and departmental priorities to inform technical discussions;

- Contribute technical advice (such as wording for targets) for negotiation purposes;
- Provide assessment of UK statistical and data capabilities for the measurement and reporting on SDGs;
- Ensure that impartiality and other aspects of the Fundamental Principles for Official Statistics are followed.

7. Statistical support towards the Post-2015 Development Agenda has also been given by assessing potential SDG frameworks against other national and international frameworks and reviewing the measurability of proposed targets. ONS have also, where appropriate, given information about the parallel international and national processes of examining the availability of data for the measurement of progress for potential targets.

III. Government Statistical Service in the United Kingdom

8. The key role of ONS was to raise the profile of SDGs across the Government Statistical Service (GSS) to prepare departments and devolved administrations to deal with statistical requirements of SDGs.

9. In September 2013, ONS convened a 'data group' of statistical colleagues from government departments and the devolved administrations of the UK (Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) to brief on the emerging Post-2015 Development Agenda. This group is tasked with providing thematic advice on the statistical measurement of proposed goals and targets. ONS represents the data group at meetings with policy officials and at European and United Nations statistical events where SDGs are discussed.

10. ONS ensures that members of the GSS data group are kept abreast of developments, including using a dedicated SDG web page to share information and developments, and convening face-to-face workshops when there are key decision points or major developments. Much of this work has been done in collaboration with the Department for International Development (DFID) whose Minister has overall charge of negotiations for the UK Government.

11. ONS, on behalf of GSS, has been involved in the wider international statistical community such as the United Nations Friends of the Chair Group on Broader Measures of Progress (FOC), the Inter-agency Expert Group on Sustainable Development indicators (IAEG-SDG) and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN). Where time and resource constraints allowed the data group has been consulted

12. Examples of the GSS's contribution to the development of measures for SDGs include:

- ONS/GSS provided statistical input into 25 of the 29 statistical notes to support Open Working Group (OWG) focus area papers ;
- Working with our statistical counterparts in Australia and the Netherlands, with whom the UK shared a seat on the Open Working Group, the UK contributed to a joint paper on 'Measuring for Sustainable Development and the post-2015 agenda' which was submitted to the FOC in September 2013;
- In 2014 a response to the FOC consultation on national data availability for potential indicators was provided;
- Comments were provided prior to publication of the report about the data revolution 'A World that Counts';

- In February 2015, ONS coordinated the GSS contribution into the UN Statistical Division response on a set of proposed preliminary indicators based on the OWG's proposed goals and targets.

IV. Developing a collection and reporting system

13. ONS (which is independent of government) is prepared to report on UK progress against the final set of SDGs and targets.

14. The review and monitoring process as proposed in the UN Secretary General's Synthesis Report (Section 5.3. 'Gauging our progress: Monitoring, evaluation and reporting') envisioned a voluntary, state-led, participatory, evidence-based, and multi-tiered process to monitor progress. The national process was described as a country-led, national component for accountability. While the overall process would involve multi-stakeholder participation, it would be based on evidence compiled from multiple sources. The proposed mechanism for this evidence base would be a report of indicators to monitor targets compiled by national statistical offices. ONS has already developed systems for reporting on the measures of national well-being and, separately, on Sustainable Development Indicators, so we are preparing for the development of a reporting system for SDGs that will build on these sets of indicators.

V. Frameworks

15. ONS has undertaken the key role to provide an assessment of how different frameworks may be applied to SDGs to help communicate their meaning.

16. ONS are planning to integrate the system to report on indicators to monitor SDG targets with those which are already used to measure national well-being and SDIs and considering other systems developed for this purpose such as the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) model.

17. The Secretary General's Synthesis report said:

"The following six essential elements would help frame and reinforce the universal, integrated and transformative nature of a sustainable development agenda and ensure that the ambition expressed by Member States in the outcome of the Open Working Group translates, communicates and is delivered at the country level".

These elements are shown in the diagrams in Annex III.

18. Diagram 1 in Annex III shows how these six essential elements might be mapped to currently proposed OWG goals, the domains of the UK's measures of national well-being and the twelve themes used for SDIs. The six elements suggested for the reporting framework proposed in the United Nations Secretary General's Synthesis report can also be aligned with others including CES framework to give a common framework. Diagram 2 in Annex III shows a potential alignment of the six elements with the current 17 OWG goals and the CES sustainable development themes.

VI. Next steps

19. ONS will continue to coordinate and provide statistical advice and comments into the development of SDGs, both nationally and internationally. It is expected that we will provide input to the Inter-Agency Expert Group on SDGs, either as members or via comments, as that group develops an indicator framework, criteria for selecting indicators

and a set of indicators to be endorsed by the United Nations Statistical Commission in March 2016. ONS will also continue to coordinate and provide statistical advice and comments to our policy colleagues during the Inter-Governmental Negotiations which are due to conclude at the end of July 2015.

20. ONS, with GSS colleagues, will need to consider and assess new and non-official data sources that may be considered to monitor SDGs. We will also need to develop new methods for monitoring SDGs, for example modelling to provide disaggregated data for particular targets, and consider additional administrative information for this purpose. In this way, we expect to contribute to the data revolution.

21. In addition, ONS is developing a reporting framework that will continue to provide measures of national well-being, but also meet the needs of UK policy departments and allow a transparent method for monitoring and reporting on SDGs. This framework is hoped to minimise duplication of efforts in the collection and production of data and meet the requirements to provide both global and national indicators for SDGs.

Annex I

United Kingdom Sustainable Development indicators

1. Economy

Headline

Indicator 1: Economic Prosperity

- Indices of Gross Domestic Product (GDP)
- GDP per head and median income
- Income distribution of the whole of the population, before housing costs

Indicator 2: Long-term unemployment

- Proportion of economically active adults unemployed for over 12 months

Indicator 3: Poverty

- Proportion of children in relative low income households before housing costs
- Proportion of children in absolute low income households before housing costs

Indicator 4: Knowledge and skills

- Human capital stock (£ trillion)
- Human capital per head (£ thousand)
- Employed human capital (£ trillion) by age group

Supplementary

Indicator 13: Population Demographics

- Total population and projected population
- Index of population and projected population
- Total number of household and projected household numbers

Indicator 14: Debt

- Public Sector Net Debt (Percentage of GDP)
- Public Sector Net Borrowing (Percentage of GDP)

Indicator 15: Pension Provision

- Percentage of workers in the automatic enrolment eligible population with a workplace pension scheme

Indicator 16: Physical Infrastructure

- Estimated asset net worth at year end by type of structure, at current prices

Indicator 17: Research and development

- Expenditure on research and development performed in business
- Expenditure on research and development related to environmental expenditure

Indicator 18: Environmental Goods and Services Sector

- Total sales in the Environment Goods and Services Sector

2. Society

Headline

Indicator 5: Healthy life expectancy

- Years of life expectancy and healthy life expectancy at birth

Indicator 6: Social Capital

- The proportion of people engaging in actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern at least once a year
- The proportion of people engaging in any volunteering activity at least once a year
- The proportion of people who have a partner, family member or friend to rely on if they have a serious problem
- The proportion of people agreeing that people in their neighbourhood can be trusted

Indicator 7: Social Mobility in Adulthood

- Proportion of 16 to 65 year olds who are in paid employment who are in managerial or professional positions by social background using father's occupational group

Indicator 8: Housing provision

- Trends in net additional dwellings

Supplementary

Indicator 19: Avoidable Mortality

- Mortality rate per 100,000 population due to avoidable causes

Indicator 20: Obesity

- Percentage of adults and children overweight or obese
- Percentage of adults and children overweight or obese based on deprivation level

Indicator 21: Lifestyles

- Proportion of people aged over 18 who smoke
- Proportion of urban trips under five miles taken by walking/cycling or public transport
- Proportion of adults doing physical activity by time spent exercising
- Average daily consumption of 5 a day portions by age group

- Trends in fruit and veg purchases measured as portions

Indicator 22: Infant health

- Proportion of full term live births with weight less than 2,500g
- Proportion of all live births, weight less than 2,500g, based on parent's occupation

Indicator 23: Air quality

- Days when air pollution is moderate or higher

Indicator 24: Noise

- Noise complaints per 1,000 population

Indicator 25: Fuel poverty

- Total number of households in fuel poverty under the low income high cost definition

3. Environment

Headline

Indicator 9: Greenhouse gas emissions

- Greenhouse gas emissions million tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent
- Greenhouse gas emissions million tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent (MTCO2e) associated with UK consumption

Indicator 10: Natural Resource Use

- Raw material consumption of construction and non-construction materials

Indicator 11: Wildlife

- Populations of wild birds

Indicator 12: Water Use

- Estimate direct actual abstractions - non-tidal surface waters & groundwater
- Estimate direct actual abstractions - non-tidal surface waters & groundwater by use

Supplementary

Indicator 26: UK carbon dioxide emissions by sector

- Annual emissions per sector measured in million tonnes of carbon dioxide

Indicator 27: Energy from renewable sources

- Proportion of gross energy consumption from renewable sources

Indicator 28: Housing energy efficiency

- Mean standard assessment procedure rating by tenure

Indicator 29: Waste disposal and recycling

- Household waste recycling rate
- Construction and demolition waste recovery rate

Indicator 30: Land use

- Land use by type
- Detailed landcover by type

Indicator 31: Origins of food consumed in the UK

- Proportion of food consumed in the UK by region or origin
- Indicator 32: Water quality
- The biological quality of rivers
- The chemical status of rivers

Indicator 33: Sustainable fisheries

- Fish stocks harvested sustainably and at full reproductive capacity

Indicator 34: Priority species and habitats

- Percentage of UK species of European importance in improving or declining conservation status
- Percentage of UK habitats of European importance in improving or declining conservation status

Indicator 35: UK biodiversity impacts overseas (Note: this indicator is under development)

Annex II

United Kingdom Measuring National Well-being

1. Personal well-being

1.1 Very high rating of satisfaction with their lives overall

1.2 Very high rating of how worthwhile the things they do are

1.3 Rated their happiness yesterday as very high

1.4 Rated their anxiety yesterday as very low

1.5 Population mental well-being

2. Our relationships

2.1 Average rating of satisfaction with family life

2.2 Average rating of satisfaction with social life

2.3 Has a spouse, family member or friend to rely on if they have a serious problem

3. Health

3.1 Healthy life expectancy at birth (male/female)

3.2 Reported a long term illness and a disability

3.3 Somewhat, mostly or completely satisfied with their health

3.4 Some evidence indicating depression or anxiety

4. What we do

4.1 Unemployment rate

4.2 Somewhat, mostly or completely satisfied with their job

4.3 Somewhat, mostly or completely satisfied with their amount of leisure time

4.4 Volunteered more than once in the last 12 months

4.5 Engaged with/participated in arts or cultural activity at least 3 times in last year

4.6 Adult participation in 30 minutes of moderate intensity sport, once per week.

5. Where we live

5.1 Crimes against the person (per 1,000 adults)

5.2 Felt fairly/very safe walking alone after dark (men/women)

5.3 Accessed natural environment at least once a week in the last 12 months

5.4 Agreed/agreed strongly they felt they belonged to their neighbourhood

5.5 Households with good transport access to key services or work (2011 = 100)

5.6 Fairly/very satisfied with their accommodation

6. Personal finance

6.1 Individuals in households with less than 60% of median income after housing costs

6.2 Median wealth per household, including pension wealth

6.3 Real median household income

6.4 Somewhat, mostly or completely satisfied with the income of their household

6.5 Report finding it quite or very difficult to get by financially

7. The economy

7.1 Real net national disposable income per head

7.2 UK public sector net debt as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product

7.3 Inflation rate (as measured by the Consumer Price Index)

8. Education and skills

8.1 Human capital - value of peoples' skills, knowledge & competences in labour market

8.2 Five or more GCSEs A* to C including English and Maths

8.3 UK residents aged 16 to 64 with no qualifications

9. Governance

9.1 Voter turnout in UK General Elections

9.2 Those who have trust in national Government

10. The natural environment

10.1 Total greenhouse gas emissions (millions of tonnes)

10.2 Protected areas in the UK (Millions hectares)

10.3 Energy consumed within the UK from renewable sources

10 4 Household waste that is recycled

Annex III

Mapping Open Working Group Goals to other frameworks

For information the list of goals (July 2014) referred to in Diagrams 1 and 2 is given here.

1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere;

2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture;

3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages;

4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all;

5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls;

6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all;

7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all;

8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all;

9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation;

10. Reduce inequality within and among countries;

11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable;

12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns;

13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts;

14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development;

15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss;

16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels;

17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

Diagram 1

Framework for OWG proposed goals, UK measuring National well-being domains and Sustainable Development Goals

Six elements (Secretary General's Report)	OWG Proposed Goals (July 2014)	UK Measuring National Well-being domains		UK Sustainable Development Indicators (SDIs)	
People: to ensure healthy lives, knowledge, and the inclusion of women and children	2, 3, 4, 5, 10	Health Education & skills		2. Healthy life expectancy at birth 7. Knowledge and Skills	
			Personal well-being Our relationships		1.Social Capital 4. Social Mobility in Adulthood
Dignity: to end poverty and fight inequalities	1, 5 , 10	Personal finance		6. Poverty	
Prosperity: to grow a strong, inclusive, and transformative economy	8, 9, 5, 10	The economy Personal finance		3.Long Term Unemployment 8. GDP, GDP per head and median income	
Justice: to promote safe and peaceful societies, and strong institutions	16, 5, 10	Governance Where we live			
Planet: to protect our ecosystems for all societies and our children	6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15	The environment Where we live		5. Housing Provision 9. Greenhouse Gas Emissions 10. Wildlife 11. Water Use 12. Natural Resource Use	
Partnership: to catalyse global solidarity for sustainable development	17	Governance			

Diagram 2

Assessment of potential frameworks for both reporting and measuring of goals and targets against other national and international frameworks

Six elements (Secretary General's Report)	**OWG Proposed Goals** (July 2014)	**CES Sustainable development indicators** Themes (TH) Here and now (HWB) Later (Capitals: HC, NC and SC) Elsewhere (trans-boundary impact, TI)
People: to ensure healthy lives, knowledge, and the inclusion of women and children	2, 3, 4, 5, 10	TH3/HWB3 Nutrition TH4/HWB4/HC3 Health TH6/HWB6/HC2 Education TH1/HWB1 Subjective well-being TH8/HWB8 Leisure
Dignity: to end poverty and fight inequalities	1, 5, 10	TH2/HWB2/TI1 Consumption and income
Prosperity: to grow a strong, inclusive, and transformative economy	8, 9, 5, 10	TH2/HWB2/TI1 Consumption and income TH5/HWB5/HC1/TI10 Labour
Justice: to promote safe and peaceful societies, and strong institutions	16, 5, 10	TH16/HWB13/SC1 Trust TH17/HWB14/SC2/TI11 Institutions
Planet: to protect our ecosystems for all societies and our children	6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15	TH10/HWB10/NC3/TI7 Land and ecosystems TH11/HWB11/NC4/TI8 Water TH12/HWB12/NC5 Air quality TH13/NC6/TI9 Climate TH14/NC1/TI5 Energy resources
Partnership: to catalyse global solidarity for sustainable development	17	TH10/HWB10/NC3/TI7 Land and ecosystems TH11/HWB11/NC4/TI8 Water TH13/NC6/TI9 Climate TH14/NC1/TI5 Energy resources TH15/NC2/TI6 Non-energy resources